

To stem potential hate attacks, model inclusive, tolerant behavior

By Anne Checkosky

As the U.S. government continues to gather information about where to place the responsibility for Tuesday's attacks on the **World Trade Center** and **Pentagon**, students may also be looking for someone to blame.

A likely target could be classmates of Muslim or Arabic origin.

However, if your district teaches a culture of tolerance and inclusion -- many districts have anti-harassment policies directed at students with and without disabilities -- it will be easier for you to put the tragic events in proper perspective for your students and prevent them from lashing out in an inappropriate manner.

At **Lakeridge Junior High School** in Orem, Utah, vice principal and social studies teacher **Axel Ramirez** uses the 3R's program to create a climate of tolerance and inclusion. Rights, Respect and Responsibility, a program devised by the **Freedom Forum** through its First Amendment Center, allows teachers to introduce religion into the curriculum where appropriate, Ramirez says.

"That's helped because our teachers aren't afraid to talk about religion or differences in religions and culture," he says. The program, which is imbedded into the school's curriculum, is currently operational in Utah and Texas. Jokes Ramirez, "I guess they figured that if it could work here, where 90 to 95 percent of the population is Mormon, it could work anywhere."

In class, Ramirez used the case of convicted polygamist **Tom Green** to explain to students why the actions of one person don't always represent the interests and viewpoints of the larger group.

Green, a Mormon and avowed polygamist, made headlines earlier this year when his lifestyle went on trial. Most members of the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints** do not subscribe to Green's view that having five wives and 30 children is perfectly acceptable and within his rights. A judge didn't agree with Greene either and convicted him of four counts of bigamy. He was sentenced to five years in prison.

The Greene case made it easier for Ramirez to explain that just as Greene doesn't represent how students at Lakeridge feel, the perpetrators of Tuesday's attack don't represent the feelings of all Muslims or Arabs.

"We teach them critical thinking; to listen to what is said in the media, rumors and statements released by fringe groups with a critical ear," Ramirez says.

There's a good mix of students at **Holmes High School** in San Antonio, Texas, says social studies teacher **Jim Long**. "I think it makes us more tolerant."

Long, a member of the **National Council for the Social Studies**, the largest association in the U.S. devoted to social studies education, says putting the tragedy in historical perspective helps students see the events in a new light.

"I was in third grade when **President John F. Kennedy** was killed. I saw him the day before in San Antonio. I still remember the breeze blowing his brown hair from the

backseat of the limousine. I tell my students that they are witnesses to history. In 20 years the question will be, "Where were you when the towers went down?" he says.

Joanne Byron, a school psychologist for the **School District of Palm Beach** (Fla.) **County** says getting kids to channel their anger in appropriate ways may alleviate their fears and prevent them from dwelling on whom to blame for the attacks.

"Get them involved in projects or fund-raisers to help the victims," she suggests.

For more information on ways to encourage children to appreciate ethnic, religious or cultural differences please go the NCCS Web site at <http://www.ncss.org/>

For more information on the 3r's program go to <http://www.freedomforum.org/> and click on First Amendment programs.

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